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ABSTRACT

This document contains guidelines for social workers and other resource persons who are assisting self-help groups. It begins by defining the purpose of the resource person as meeting with group members on a consistent basis to provide information about available resources, offer suggestions and advice when appropriate, answer questions, and offer insight to members as they develop the group. Eight essential structural features of self-help groups are listed and four functional attributes which emerge from these features are discussed. Five phases of self-help groups identified by Katz (1970) are explained. It is noted that the major role of a resource person is to provide information about available resources. Several specific areas in which resources should be provided are discussed: (1) the media; (2) community and counseling services; (3) meeting location; (4) speakers and/or films; (5) professional assistance; (6) counseling service; (7) recreational services; (8) self-help groups and associations; (9) self-help clearinghouses; and (10) suggested reading lists. The need for legal counsel is considered and the areas of informed consent and confidentiality are addressed. Ways of organizing and using group meetings are described. The appendices contain a list of self-help clearinghouses and suggested readings for self-help groups. (NB)

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Guideline for a Resource Person Assisting a Self-Help Group

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN AND FAMILY RESOURCES

In Partial Fulfillment
for the Degree
MASTER OF SCIENCE

BY
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DeKalb, IL

August, 1987

CG 020259

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Guideline for a Resource Person

Assisting a Self-Help Group

There is clear evidence of the need for resource persons' to assist individuals in a local community to initiate a self-help group, as reported by Toseland and Hacker (1985). They suggested that self-help groups often use social workers and other professionals in the development of self-help groups, welcoming their participation as long as the professionals do not attempt to dominate or take over the group. This guideline was developed as a result of the author conducting a thorough review of self-help resources and assisting a group of local residents in developing a self-help group for depressed persons.

Role of Resource Person

The purpose of a resource person would be to meet with the group members on a consistent basis to provide information about available resources, offer suggestions and advice when appropriate, answer questions, and offer insight to its members as they develop the group. Meetings with the group members when the resource person is present are only at times which are defined as business or organizational meetings where there is planning, discussions, and where resources would be provided. These meetings do not involve the resource person providing any type of treatment or the discussion of personal issues by the group members. If at any time a group member would request or be in need of professional treatment the resource person would provide resources that the group member may wish to utilize. It is imperative that the resource person be able to identify appropriate community resources to alleviate a problem, whether it be that of a group or individual concern (Toseland & Hacker, 1982).

It is recognized that some groups may request that the resource person or some other consultant or counselor meet with them. Also, some agencies may sponsor a self-help group with a counselor meeting with the group for supportive purposes.

In providing assistance to other professionals helping to establish a self-help group, this guideline includes the following sections, elaborating the major components to be considered.

Structural Features of Self-Help Groups

Katz (1970) pointed out eight essential structural features that characterize the self-help group and distinguish it from other types of social agencies. These include:

1. Self-help organizations share the properties of small groups, satisfying the needs of the individual.

2. Self-help groups are problem centered, organized with reference to a specific problem or problems.

3. Members of such groups tend to be peers.

4. Self-help groups hold common goals that emerge from the group rather than being given to by outside professionals.

5. Action is group action. The action or active participation of individual members is seen as a part of the whole, having a bearing or effect upon it.

6. Helping others is an expressed norm of the group.

7. The role of the "professional" is typically that of a consultant, resource advisor or evaluator rather than a leader or decision-maker.

8. Power and leadership in self-help groups is on a peer or horizontal basis.

Functional Attributes of Self-Help Groups

Katz (1970) also identified four functional attributes which emerge from these structural characteristics. These include:

1. Communication is horizontal rather than vertical.

2. Personal involvement becomes a requirement in all self-help groups.

3. The individual member of the self-help group is considered and is held responsible for his own actions. He or she is expected to give, produce, and act to the best of his ability in accordance with group definitions and standards of what is acceptable or unacceptable.

4. Groups are action oriented, their philosophy being that members learn by doing and are changed by doing. A result of the emphasis on action is that the groups create an opportunity for enhancing members' self-esteem by successful or useful endeavors. Achievement by the group can enhance individual self-esteem, since every member is expected to be involved and to contribute.

Phases of Self-Help Groups

Most self-help groups go through several phases during its development. Katz (1970) identified five phases through which self-help groups pass in their evolution toward a more sophisticated and professionalized type of organization. These phases include:

1. Origin. The first phase comes about when two or more persons are motivated to perform a remedial action regarding a common problem. Frequently, such individuals advertise in the public press, attempting to reach others who share the same problem. A public meeting may be organized as a means of getting started and attracting publicity through the media. All the initial work of planning and conducting is typically carried out by individuals who initiate the project.

2. Informal organizational stage. In this phase the movement begins to spread through friends and acquaintances; face-to-face group contacts occur, further public meetings are held, and individuals (members of the group) engage in enlarging the

circle of participants through personal contact, newspaper advertising, and exchange of information with one another.

3. Emergence of leadership. Each group, at an early stage, presents the opportunity for strong leadership to emerge in the person of a single individual or small group of close working associates. These leaders assume the most important tasks in the organization. Eventually, a division of labor appears and certain functions become identified with certain persons both within and outside the leadership group.

4. Beginnings of formal organization. As a definite leadership core emerges, the group enters the stage of more formal organization. The roles of the leaders as well as the members are more clearly defined and established through practice and trial and error. Structural changes may begin to become necessary given the increasing volume and complexity of the functions undertaken by the group.

5. Beginnings of professionalization. After some time, the leadership group may find it necessary to give up some of its own routine organizational functions to paid staff members. With the growing complexity of organization, membership, and program, it becomes necessary to shift administrative functions, with the leadership group retaining its primary responsibility of policy and program. As increasingly professional activities are undertaken, professionally qualified staff members may be added. The result of this will be a gradual shift of functions among all involved.

Information and Resources

The major role of a resource person is that of providing information about available resources that may be useful to the members as they develop the group. There are several specific areas in which resources should be provided. These areas are listed below.

Media

The use of the media is an excellent means to advertise the emergence of a self-help group. Providing an address and telephone listing of such resources as local radio stations, cable TV stations, local newspapers, and community and counseling agencies can prove to be very useful as an aid in making the community aware of the beginnings of a self-help group. In addition to using the media, posting flyers within the community is a good visible means of getting the word out to the people. Lastly, making use of the crisis line in the county will definitely generate referrals for a self-help group.

The resource person can be very helpful to the group in this process. Resource persons' can provide assistance where appears needed in the development of advertisement materials. They can assist as well as critique the development of flyers, copies of announcements or articles in newspapers, and radio announcements. This type of assistance can be very helpful to a group who is just starting out.

Community and Counseling Services

Group members can make use of various community and counseling services for the benefit of the group as well as themselves. First of all, group members can meet with professionals from social service and counseling agencies to share information about the self-help group in the hope to gain recognition and generate referrals. In these meetings members share the purpose of the self-help/support group, appropriateness for membership, dues, if any, time, place, date, and frequency of meetings, and how clients from these agencies can get in contact with a group member. Members also need to emphasize that the self-help group is not in any way meant to replace treatment or other services, but is merely another form of help that can be used in conjunction with treatment. It is imperative that members seek the cooperation and support of those professionals who may potentially be an excellent provider of referrals.

It may be appropriate for the resource person to attend some of these meetings along with the group

members. This gives the resource person an opportunity to obtain information about the services they provide as well as describing their role in the development of the group. Often times professionals are more willing to refer clients to a self-help group if they know other professionals in the community are assisting the group by providing resources and offering suggestions and direction.

It is imperative that all community and counseling agencies be sent a flyer attached with a letter describing the nature and purpose of the self-help group, regardless of whether or not the group members talked with them in person or over the phone. It is essential that these agencies be made aware of the emergence of such a group if members want to see the group grow.

Meeting Location

Group members can make use of community and counseling agencies in many other ways. Community agencies as well as churches can be helpful when it comes to providing space for group members to have their meetings. Members can speak with different professionals in town as well as pastors about the possibility of using a room to have their meetings. Usually community agencies and churches are very receptive to this idea and almost always charge no fee for the use of the room. Members need to make arrangements as to the use of the room by working out such details as the time, and dates the room would be used. The needs of the group will determine the frequency of meetings and how often they will need to make use of the room.

Speakers and/or Films

There may be times when group members will want to have speakers or view films in their group meetings. Community and counseling agencies are excellent resources for these purposes. Members can contact any one of these agencies and generally for a small fee have a speaker come out and talk to the group on the topic of their choice or if they choose they could rent a film from one of these agencies. Both of these choices would be very educational and informative about

what is known about depression or other emotional problems.

Professional Assistance

Group members can also make use of these agencies by requesting assistance from professionals in the development of the group. If members are finding it difficult and time consuming developing a group, they may find it useful to seek help from professionals. Professionals may be willing to do a great deal of the work involved with the development of a self-help group. This type of arrangement can be mutually beneficial for the professional as well as the group.

Counseling Services

Finally, the resource person provides community and counseling resources for the purpose of making the group members aware of the services available if they should need them for their personal use. Given these individuals are experiencing problems with depression, which may require help beyond that of a self-help group, resources along with brochures describing their services should be made available.

Recreational Services

The needs of the group will determine the appropriateness of the resource person supplying the group with information on recreational services. While some groups may want to get together to do aerobics, yoga, or swimming, other groups may have no desire at all to do these things. It is essential for the resource person to find out the needs of the group from the start and to work with that. It is equally important that the resource person be in touch with the growing needs of the group and be ready to provide additional resources whenever necessary.

Self-Help Groups and Associations

The resource person should provide the group with information about existing self-help groups/associations. Several resources can be of great

assistance (Gruber, 1987). This type of information may be useful to members if they are experiencing problems starting their own group. Much of the information provided by these groups and organizations offer helpful suggestions and ideas for developing self-help groups.

Group members may choose to attend one of these other self-help groups for the purpose of obtaining information from other individuals experiencing the same problem, as well as getting first hand experience at seeing how some other groups are run. Observing other groups may generate some new ideas about developing and running their own group.

Members may also want to visit other groups in the hope that one of its members will be willing to come and speak at one of their meetings. Speakers from other self-help groups can provide beneficial information to the entire group about the development of a self-help group, topics of interest, as well as answer pertinent questions.

Self-Help Clearinghouses

Group members should also be given a listing of National Self-Help Clearinghouses. Self-help clearinghouses serve the purpose of collecting and disseminating information concerning all types of self-help groups (Gruber, 1987). Clearinghouses typically provide the organization of mutual consultancy workshops bringing laymen and professionals together with self-help group representatives. Also provided are educational training programs and research on the emergence, functioning, and effectiveness of self-help groups. If they choose, group members can write various clearinghouses to obtain information that may be useful to them as they develop their group. While some information is free, typically there is a fee for some of the pamphlets, brochures, and various pieces of literature that is disseminated (see Appendix A.)

Suggested Reading List

In addition to all the resources stated above, the resource person should also supply a reading list of journal references that may be beneficial to the group.

The articles need to address the area of developing a self-help group and through their use should prove to be a helpful aid to the group (see Appendix B).

Legal Counsel

A legal officer should also be contacted regarding liability issues. The nature of the self-help group may determine whether or not malpractice insurance is desirable if the resource person is not covered by liability insurance of an agency.

In addition to consulting with a legal officer, a human subject informed consent form should be developed for group members to sign, which clearly defines the role of a resource person. This form should be signed by any individual in the group who personally interacts with the resource person. The wording of one such form is similar to the following:

Human Subject Informed Consent Form:

This form indicates that you consent for me, (name), of (agency), to be your resource person as you develop a self-help group. My role will be to share in business and planning sessions for purposes of providing resources, suggestions, and ideas. My role does not involve providing any type of treatment. Your signature below indicates that you give your full and informed consent to receive these services. For further information, you can contact (phone).

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is of utmost importance. At no time will I share or reveal any of the names who are participating in this group. This signed form will be kept in my possession, thereby maintaining your confidentiality. I have read the above information and have received a copy.

Signature

Date

Group Meetings

There are many ways members can utilize group time. One of the things a resource person can provide is helpful suggestions as to how group time may be used. Such suggestions include:

1. Sharing of experience. This is a time where members come together to share experiences about themselves, ask for suggestions, offer suggestions, and give encouragement as well as receive support. Typically one member leads the support group each week.

For the benefit of the members as well as the group, ground rules should be developed by its members. This should be done in the beginning stages of group development. This can be done by members getting together and sharing ideas about what the rules of the group should be. Once this is done a copy of the group rules should be given to all new members. These rules may be modified as the group grows and the needs change. This ground rules can be expanded on if necessary. One example of such ground rules follows:

A. Maintaining confidentiality. Everything talked about in the group stays within the group.

B. Being honest with group members.

C. Don't talk about group members when they are not present.

D. Being and acting responsible for oneself. Members should not attempt to take on more than they can handle. If at any time members are not emotionally stable to help others in the group, they should indicate so.

E. State hours to group members when it is ok to be contacted on the phone.

2. Social events. Members can spend time each week doing such things together as going out to eat, watching a movie, or just taking a walk. Walking, which is a relatively mild exercise, can be an excellent way to introduce individuals to the many benefits of movement (Kelley, Riggan, Rothman, & Swenson, 1986).

3. Recreation and exercise. This is a time where members get together to do such things as aerobics, yoga, swimming at the YMCA, or other forms of exercise. These types of exercise can be done at a health club, in the park, or even in ones own home. Kelly, Riggan, Rothman, and Swenson (1986) suggested that exercise and exercise programs are excellent means of helping individuals adopt healthy behaviors in their daily lives.

Many individuals encounter problems in living that precipitate excessive stress and anxiety, such as interpersonal conflicts, demands that exceed the individual's capacity to meet them, and threats to the satisfaction of psychosocial needs or desires. Consequently, Vattano (1978) suggested three effective self-management procedures for coping with stress and anxiety. These include:

1. Relaxation training. Muscle relaxation is used to relax the muscles and reduce tension.

2. Systematic desensitization. This involves a set of procedures that are used for treating problems with inappropriate conditioned anxiety.

3. Meditation. This is used to influence the operation of the nervous system and offset the harmful effects of maladaptive stress and anxiety. Such approaches include: 1) transcendental meditation, 2) yoga, 3) Zen, and 4) Christian and Jewish meditation.

These techniques as well as exercise can be particularly useful to depressed persons due to the fact they usually have fewer resources to help them cope with stress and anxiety.

Lamkin (1984) suggested that peace of mind, relief from tension, and enjoyment of life is available to anyone who practices both "high tech" and "high touch" management techniques. High tech/touch stress management means more then reducing muscle tension and mental frustration. It also means inspiring peace of mind, hope, and a feeling of well-being. Lamkin (1984) suggested several techniques for both high tech and high touch stress management. These include:

High Tech Stress Management

1. Deep muscle relaxation
2. Relaxation response meditation
3. Biofeedback training
4. Physical activity

High Touch Stress Management

1. Spiritual uplifts
2. Social support
3. Laughter and play
4. A purpose in life

A life balanced by the high tech/high touch stress management approach can be extremely beneficial in meeting many of the challenges and difficulties depressed persons experience. Using these techniques will most often help in obtaining physical and emotional wellness (Lamkin, 1984).

4. Speakers from self-help groups. Members may find it beneficial to have speakers from various self-help groups dealing with depression come to discuss issues such as depression, developing a self-help group, and ways to help a group grow and prosper.

5. Films. Occasionally group members may find it helpful to view films about various topics. Most films can be rented from social service agencies and associations. For a low cost fee universities often provide film rentals to community groups.

6. Speakers from social service agencies and universities. From time to time group members may want to have professionals come to speak at their meetings. Professionals can provide a wealth of information about relevant topics or illnesses as well as helpful suggestions as to how group members can be helpful to one another. Universities as well can provide speakers to report on specific topics.

7. Family participation. Often times family members do not understand when others in the family are going through a depresssion or other forms of emotional problems. Therefore, involving

the family members in some of the group meetings, particularly when professional speakers are present, can be helpful to the family's understanding of the problem. Not only can family members learn about the illness, or relevant issues, but also ways they can be supportive and helpful to the person. Those individuals with greater amounts of family support are less likely to show depressive or other symptoms and more likely to have effective coping responses (Mitchell, Cronkite, & Moos, 1983).

Summary

It seems as though the resource person, as well as other professionals in the community, can be of great assistance and value in the development of a self-help group. Along with providing appropriate information and resources, professionals can offer helpful suggestions, give recommendations when needed, and answer pertinent questions about the development of a group. Professionals can also take the role of developing a self-help group if they choose. Whatever the role, professionals providing assistance appears to be quite beneficial to the development of a self-help group.

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Vattano, A.J. (1978). Self-management procedures for coping with stress. Social Work, 23, 113-118.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Self-Help Clearinghouses

NATIONAL SELF-HELP CLEARINGHOUSE

Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York
33 West 42nd Street, Room 1227, New York, NY 10036 • (212) 840-1259

REGIONAL SELF-HELP CLEARINGHOUSES

CALIFORNIA
California Self-Help Center
U.C.L.A., 2349 Franz Hall
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024
(213) 825-1799, Gerald Goodman

San Francisco Self-Help Clearinghouse
2398 Pine Street
San Francisco, CA 94115
(415) 921-4401, Mara Weiss

CANADA
Self-Help Clearinghouse
CAMAC, Inc.
3737 Vanhorne
Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3S 1R9
(514) 341-1440, Irene Ranti

CONNECTICUT
Self-Help Mutual Support Network
19 Howe Street
New Haven, CT 06115
(203) 789-7645, Vicki Smith

ILLINOIS
Self-Help Center
1600 Dodge Center, Suite S-122
Evanston, IL 60201
(312) 328-0470, Daryl Isenberg

KANSAS
Self-Help Center of Kansas
3428 East Central
Wichita, KS 67208
(316) 686-1205, Evelyn Middelstadt

MASSACHUSETTS
Cooperative Extension Service
University of Massachusetts
113 Skinner Hall
Amherst, MA 01003
(413) 545-2313, Warren Schumacher

MICHIGAN
Michigan Self-Help Clearinghouse
120 W. Michigan Avenue, Suite 900
Lansing, MI 48933
(517) 752-5858 In MI (800) 484-7373

MINNESOTA
Mutual Help Resource Center
Wilder Foundation, Community Care Unit
919 Lafond Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55104
(612) 642-4060, Tom Duke

MISSOURI
Kansas City Assoc. for Mental Health
1020 East 63rd Street
Kansas City, KS 64110
(816) 361-8563

NEBRASKA
Self-Help Information Services
1601 Euclid Avenue
Lincoln, NE 68502
(402) 476-9668, Barbara Fox

NEW JERSEY
New Jersey Self-Help Clearinghouse
St. Clare's Hospital-Riverside Medical Ctr
Pocono Road
Denville, NJ 07834
(201) 625-9565 In NJ (800) 367-6274
Ed Madara

NEW YORK
Brooklyn Self-Help Clearinghouse
30 Third Avenue
Brooklyn NY 11217
(718) 834-7341 or 7332, Barbara Berkvist

Long Island Self-Help Clearinghouse
New York Institute of Technology
Carleton Avenue
Central Islip, NY 11722
(516) 348-3030, Audrey Leif Muller

New York City Self-Help Clearinghouse
1012 Eighth Avenue
Brooklyn NY 11215
(718) 788-8787, Fran Dory

New York State Self-Help Clearinghouse
Council on Children and Families
Empire State Plaza
Erastus Corning Tower 2, 28th Floor
Albany, NY 12223
(518) 473-4329, Mary Huber

Economic Opportunity Program
318 Madison Avenue
Elmira, NY 14901

Human Service Planning Council
432 State Street, Room 220
Schenectady, NY 12305

Mental Health Chapter
973 East Avenue
Rochester, NY 14607

Reachout of St. Lawrence County
203 Sisson Hall, Potsdam College
Potsdam, NY 13676

St. Mary's Hospital
427 Guy Park Avenue
Amsterdam, NY 12010

The Volunteer Center
115 E. Jefferson Street, Suite 300
Syracuse, NY 13202

The United Way of Dutchess County
P.O. Box 832, 75 Market Street
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

Niagara Self-Help Clearinghouse
151 East Avenue
Lockport, NY 14094
(716) 433-3780, Charlene Brumley

Orange County Dept. of Mental Health
Consultation and Education Dept.
Harriman Drive, Drawer 471
Goshen, NY 1092
(914) 294-6185, Phyllis Cashin

Rockland County CMHC
Sanitorium Road
Pomona, NY 10970
(914) 354-0200, ext. 2237, Robert Page

Westchester Self-Help Clearinghouse
Westchester Community College
Academic/Arts Building
75 Grasslands Road
Valhalla, NY 10595
(914) 347-3620, Leslie Borck

OREGON
Northwest Regional Self-Help Clearinghous
718 West Burnside
Portland, OR 97209
(503) 226-9360, Doreen Akkerman

PENNSYLVANIA
Self-Help Group Network
710 1/2 South Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15221
(412) 247-5400, Betty Hepner

Self-Help Information Network Exchange
SHINE Voluntary Action Center
200 Adams Avenue, Room 317
Scranton, PA 18503
(717) 961-1234, Arlene Hopkins

TENNESSEE
Overlook Mental Health Center
6909 Kingston Pike
Knoxville, TN 36919
(615) 588-9747, Carole Vocher-Mayberry

TEXAS
Dallas Self-Help Clearinghouse
Dallas County Mental Health Association
2500 Maple Avenue
Dallas, TX 75201
(214) 871-2420, Carol Madison

Tarrant County Self-Help Clearinghouse
Tarrant County Mental Health Association
3136 West 4th Street
Fort Worth, TX 76102
(817) 335-5405, Karen Hale

VERMONT
Vermont Self-Help Clearinghouse
c/o Parents Anonymous
P.O. Box 829
Montpelier, VT 05602
(802)229-5724/(800)544-5030

WASHINGTON, D.C.
Greater Washington Self-Help Coalition
Mental Health Assoc. of Northern VA
100 North Washington St., Suite 232
Falls Church, VA 22046
(703) 536-4100, Linda Figueroa

WASHINGTON
Crisis Clinic/Thurston & Mason Counties
P.O. Box 2463
Olympia, WA 98507
(206) 352-2211 (Crisis Line)
(206) 426-3100 (Shelton Crisis Line)
Teri Ramsauer

WISCONSIN
Continuing Education in Mental Health
University of Wisconsin Extension
414 Lowell Hall, 610 Langden Street
Madison, WI 53706
(608) 263-4432, Roger Williams

Mutual Aid Self-Help Association
P.O. Box 09304
Milwaukee, WI 53209
(414) 461-1466, Maryann Heitl

APPENDIX B

Suggested Readings for Self-Help Groups

Suggested Readings for Self-Help Groups

Denton, D.K. (1984). No-nonsense solutions to stress. Management World, 13, 26-27.

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